

U.S. gets tougher on Russia; new sanctions, accusations

By JOSH LEDERMAN AND MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In its toughest challenge to Russia to date, the Trump administration accused Moscow on Thursday of an elaborate plot to penetrate America’s electric grid, factories, water supply and even air travel through cyber hacking. The U.S. also hit targeted Russians with sanctions for alleged election meddling for the first time since President Donald Trump took office.

The list of Russians being punished includes all 13 indicted last month by special counsel Robert Mueller, a tacit acknowledgement by the administration that at least some of Mueller’s Russia-related probe has merit. Trump has repeatedly sought to discredit Mueller’s investigation into



White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders answered questions about Russia, tariffs and other topics during the daily briefing Thursday.

Russian interference in the presidential election, but the sanctions appeared to rely on the special counsel’s legal conclusions in deciding who should be named. The sanctions freeze any assets the individuals may have in U.S. jurisdictions and bar Americans from doing business with them.

The named Russians — 19 in all — are unlikely to have any assets in the United States that would be covered, making the move largely symbolic. But it could help inoculate the president from persistent claims he’s afraid or unwilling to stand up to Russian President Vladimir Putin or to fight back against

efforts to undermine America’s democracy and domestic affairs. “We’re going to be tough on Russia until they decide to change their behavior,” said White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders. At the same time, she left open the possibility of better U.S.-Russia cooperation, arguing that “if we can work together to combat world threats on things like North Korea, then we should.” U.S. national security officials said the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and intelligence agencies determined Russian intelligence and others were behind a broad range of cyberattacks starting a year ago. Russian hackers infiltrated the networks that run the basic services an Americans rely on each day: nuclear, water and manufacturing facilities like factories.

The officials said the hackers chose their targets methodically, obtained access to computer systems, conducted “network reconnaissance” and then attempted to cover their tracks by deleting evidence of the intrusions. The U.S. government has helped the industries expel the Russians from all systems known to have been penetrated, but additional breaches could be discovered, said the officials, who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive national security information. The officials described Russia’s operation as ongoing. The U.S. accusations and accompanying sanctions mark a stepped-up attempt by Trump’s administration to show it’s adequately confronting Russia over hacking, election meddling

and general efforts to compromise Western democracies and infrastructure. Trump on Thursday also joined the leaders of Britain, France and Germany in blaming Moscow for the poisoning of an ex-Russian spy who was living in England. The sanctions prompted a swift threat of retaliation from Russia’s government, which said a response was already being prepared. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov suggested the Trump administration had timed the action to taint this weekend’s presidential election in Russia, in which President Vladimir Putin is expected to win an overwhelming victory. “It is tied to U.S. internal disorder, tied of course to our electoral calendar,” Ryabkov was quoted as saying by the Russian state news agency Tass.

Trump owns up to making things up

By CALVIN WOODWARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has owned up to making things up. For a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Trump was by his own admission unprepared — deficient in the fundamentals of the Canada-U.S. trade relationship that he’d been railing about since the campaign. He insisted to Trudeau that the U.S. was running a trade deficit with Canada, a statement contradicted by U.S. government statistics. He was winging it, he confided to donors at a private Missouri political fundraiser Wednesday night. “I didn’t even know,” he said. “I had no idea.” Others might be mortified at being caught short. Not this president. For Trump the showman, the episode illustrated his skill at improvisation. Still, it was a rare admission that he will say things without knowing if they are true. Trump’s impulse to replace fact with fiction has defined him as a politician and as a businessman before that. Depositions reviewed by AP from his litigious years in real estate show a history of false statements about his property and wealth. Asked once about overstating the number of units sold in a Las Vegas tower, he said he didn’t intend his answer to be taken literally. Trump’s years of questioning President Barack Obama’s citizenship showed a willingness to perpetuate myth that was seen again early in his presidential campaign, when he insisted against all evidence that Muslims took to the streets in New Jersey to celebrate the 2001 terrorist attack across the river in Manhattan. In office, he routinely misuses numbers — trade

statistics among them — and recounts events to suit his agenda even if the facts don’t fit. Of the Pulse nightclub massacre in Florida, he said, “If you had one person in that room that could carry a gun and knew how to use it, it wouldn’t have happened, or certainly not to the extent it did,” a statement belied by the fact that the club had an armed guard on duty who immediately exchanged fire with the gunman. In leaked audio of the Missouri fundraiser, first reported by *The Washington Post*, Trump says that in his meeting with Trudeau, he thought the U.S. must be running a trade deficit with Canada because the Canadians have been smart about trade and “we’re so stupid.” “Nice guy, good-looking guy, comes in — ‘Donald, we have no trade deficit.’” Trump recounted. “He’s very proud because everybody else, you know, we’re getting killed.” “I said, ‘Wrong, Justin, you do.’ I didn’t even know. ... I had no idea. I just said, ‘You’re wrong.’ You know why? Because we’re so stupid ... And I thought they were smart.” Trump went on to say that his position was ultimately vindicated when he had U.S. and Canadian aides take a closer look at trade between the two countries. That conclusion is not supported by the numbers.

Canadian Foreign Affairs spokesman Adam Austin offered this counter: “According to their own statistics, the U.S. runs a trade surplus with Canada.” Trump mischaracterizes the trade balance by considering only trade in goods and ignoring services. On goods, the U.S. ran a deficit of \$17.6 billion with Canada last year. That was offset by a surplus in trade in services. Overall, the U.S. Census Bureau reports a U.S. trade surplus of \$2.8 billion last year with Canada.



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